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CRY OF HALF A MILLION OF GEORGIA'S CHILDREN.

A PLEA

— FOR —

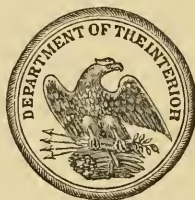
SIX MONTHS SCHOOLS

BY

ATTICUS G. HAYGOOD.

ATLANTA, GA.:
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1888.

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THE CRY OF HALF A MILLION CHILDREN.

There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty. Prov. xi. 24.

And they were the more fierce, saying, he stirreth up the people teaching. Luke xxiii, 5.

I THANK DR. LEE, PASTOR OF TRINITY CHURCH, Atlanta, for inviting me to make a plea to-night for half a million children in Georgia who need and deserve better opportunities for elementary education than they can get without more help from the State that gave them birth, and whose destinies they will some day control. I am glad the cause of these children is on his heart. Would God a thousand preachers in Georgia felt as he. If there were, twelve months would revolutionize public sentiment upon this most vital question, and the day of our deliverance from the apathy and darkness of illiteracy, would begin to dawn. It cannot hurt a Christian pulpit to plead for the poor. It is in harmony with the kingdom of Him who is "making a new earth" that in His own time He may bring men unto a new Heaven.

A SETTLED QUESTION.

Whether we will adopt the policy of State-supported public schools in Georgia, is not now a question in debate. Before the Revolution that, in 1861, broke out into war, there was some discussion among us concerning public schools, and sore need of more. The discussion was relevant to the facts of that time, for we had no public schools. There was then little concern among us about the education of the masses, and nearly half the population were by law—made necessary by the conditions of life at that time—debarred all opportunity for instruction in books. After the Revolution public schools were inevitable. Their neces-

sity was made manifest ; the new facts were insistent, and the need was exigent. We had tried to stand our educational pyramid on its apex, and had failed.

The policy of public schools, for elementary education, supported or aided by the State, was asserted in the Constitution that was evolved out of the reconstruction period. When, in 1879, the people of Georgia met in convention, to reconsider and recast their Constitution, they said: "We will have public schools for our children," and in the organic law, commanded the Legislature to provide them.

Some excellent people say they do not believe in public schools, and some believe that the State, in the nature of things, has no function in this business. The objection comes too late ; in a republic, what the people affirm to be a function of government is a function of government. If the minority cannot agree with the majority, and cannot change its opinion, there remains one of three things—submission, revolution, or emigration. Wherefore, I say, unless objectors propose to change the organic law of the State, their objection comes too late.

SYSTEM OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD.

The organic law concerning public schools in Georgia, cannot be changed. Little as our concern for the education of the masses is, we care enough to vote down and out any party or any candidate proposing to do away with our public schools.

The public school for elementary education is not peculiar to Georgia ; it is the American system ; it is in the organic law of every State in the Union. It is the system of well nigh the civilized world. Even Japan has introduced the public school system, and pays her teachers better than Georgia does.

If we could at this time overturn our public school system, would it be a good thing to do ? For one, I should favor doing away with the public schools if either one of two things could be made plain to me. First, that leaving

the masses in ignorance is in itself a good thing; or if, second, some better lever than State-supported public schools has been found for lifting the masses out of the mire of ignorance.

BLESSINGS OF IGNORANCE.

Not many believe in the blessings of ignorance, except with qualifications; still fewer, except in select circles, have the hardihood to advocate their belief. No man in his senses believes ignorance to be a good thing for him; no man not too ignorant to think, and not too mean to care, believes ignorance to be a good thing for his children.

Not a few seem to think that ignorance is very good for certain others they call "the masses." And this they think "not that they care for the poor," but because they would keep them poor. If we dig through their words down to their real thought, it is simple as it is selfish: "It is best for me that certain people abide in ignorance; I can manage them more easily, and can hire them more cheaply."

This narrow meanness is veiled by a show of fair words. I have heard such men philosophizing. They will tell their familiars—they are ashamed to say such things to the poor themselves—"Going to school tends to make the poor discontented with their lot in life." Thank God! it does. No greater curse could fall upon the poor than this sort of contentment that is little better than the stagnation of mental and moral death.

But these miserable pretenders care not for the trouble that such discontent gives to the poor; but for the inconvenience it may bring to those whose lot in life is different. There is no honesty in this sort of philosophy concerning the blessings of ignorance; it is sham and hypocrisy from top to bottom. The proof of insincerity is perfect; its advocates never practice their doctrine as to themselves and their own children.

THE MASSES AND THOSE WHO SNEER.

Not a few sneer at all efforts "to elevate the masses," as

both a chimerical and dangerous experiment of certain ill-balanced people, whose arguments and works are, as they suppose, finally disposed of by calling them "humanitarians," "visionaries," "fanatics," "cranks." It is the sort of sentiment that English lordlings feel when they denounce glorious Gladstone and persecute brave Parnell because they plead for Irish peasants that the chief end of existence for a poor tenant farmer is not alone to pay rents to absentee landlords.

Certain it is that no man counting himself as among the "masses" sneers at efforts to lift them up. The sneer comes from certain people, more prosperous than good, who, feeling themselves to be lifted up—whether by the accidents of fortune or blood—fear that their privileges will be lessened when those below them begin to move. It is easy to understand both the contempt and fear of those—say "higher classes" if you will—who contemplate with unrest the betterment of the condition of the poor and lowly. Such feeling among the "privileged classes" are not peculiar to our times. So in old Rome the patricians felt towards their plebeian neighbors. We could not expect better things of that colossal paganism. But such sentiments are out of harmony with Christian civilization. Where Christ reigns, such sentiments die. In ancient Jerusalem the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Herodians looked with contempt and wrath—dashed with fear—upon the efforts of the Man of Galilee to instruct the ignorant and to help the helpless of His time. To them—"preserving their game" and nursing their respectabilities—He was an agitator and an innovator. When Roman Pilate declared from the judgment seat, "I find no fault in this Man," and the chief priests could bring no other charge against him, "they were the more fierce, saying, 'He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.'"

But the people, these "masses," are the majority of the human race and the best part of it; their cause is the cause

of God, who is very jealous of their rights, ever listening as a Father to their bitter cry, and they will yet be lifted up by Him who "draws all men unto Himself."

BUT IS THERE ANY BETTER WAY

of educating the people than by State-supported public schools? Most of the people are poor ; with them the burdens of simply living are heavy. They are not able to educate even in the rudiments their children. But the whole people are easily able, without serious burdens, to educate the children of all the people.

If, in such a work, the well-to-do bear more of the burden than the poor, this is as it ought to be. It is the instinct of human justice that it should be so ; it is the law of God. Sound political economy, the philosophy of republican government, and the Christian religion make it the duty as well as the policy of the State to provide for the education of all its children.

LOCAL OPTION DOUBLY SURE TO FAIL.

This work cannot be left to local option. Most of our cities and a few of our richer counties have, under local option, taxed themselves to provide good schools for their children. The splendid results show what blessings would come to the whole people, if schools as good were in every county and village in the State. The trouble in local option is, the counties that most need the schools are doubly sure not to get them ; being the most illiterate, they do not wish for them and would vote against them, and being the poorest, they could not provide for them if they wanted them. The worst result of ignorance is, perhaps, that the untaught know not the blessings of education and do not care for them. If it be left to communities whether they will provide themselves good schools, education will be put in jeopardy.

The richer must help the poorer ; the more intelligent guide the more ignorant. For we have not here a question

only as to what people wish, but also as to what they need. Moreover, it is a question most grave and radical, whether the richer and more enlightened communities can afford that their partners in government should forever remain unfit to do their part with credit. The evils that grow out of illiteracy cost government ten times more than it would cost to educate the whole people.

Consider Georgia in the regions where there is the greatest need. Think of our fellow citizens among the mountains, in the wire grass, and in the more thinly settled counties near the coast. In these sections are some of the noblest and most cultured of our people; they have done their best to bring up their counties; the burden has been too great for them and they have failed. The State of Georgia needs good schools in the Blue Ridge counties and the wire grass as in the richer sections and more prosperous cities. For these people are our brethren and they are our partners in the difficult business of government.

The whole people should see to it that the whole property of the people provide good schools for the children of the people.

CHURCH DREAMERS.

There are dreamers who talk of educating the people by the churches. This is idle talk. The churches cannot do it. I do not say "the Church," but the "churches"—their name is Legion. Their diversities, not to say divisions, make unity of effort impossible. So far from being able to provide schools for all the people, the churches in Georgia have not been able to take proper care of their three or four colleges. They have beggared and slain them rather. I have said "not able;" it is intolerable to think that they could and would not.

But why ask such questions about the churches in relation to common schools? Whether able or unable to do this work, everybody knows that the churches never have done it, have never tried to do it and are not now so much

as thinking of trying to do it. And yet with half a million children in Georgia of school age and fast outgrowing the period of instruction, many good church people, with not a purpose or thought of doing anything themselves, revile the public schools, not because the State has starved them into inefficiency, but because it so much as set them going at all.

If in theory there were unanswerable arguments against State-supported public schools, these arguments are overturned by invincible facts. We have the public schools and they have come to stay. The one question now is, whether we will make the best of them or the worst of them. So far we have made the worst of them.

HOW WE OBEY THE CONSTITUTION.

After what manner is the State carrying out the organic law? Let us seek the cold facts, without reference to any incidental or collateral matters. A few simple statements, taken from official records will be enough to make people think, who ever think; to make ashamed all who care for the honor of their State; to make anxious all who have hope of its future; to stir the hearts and consciences of all who love their fellow men.

The Department of Education for Georgia has this year taken a new school census—the first since 1882. Between the ages of “6 and 18,” the school age in Georgia, there are 560,281 children and young people. Whites, 292,624; negroes, 267,657. (The negro is not, it seems, “dying out;” he is not solving his problem that way—there were only 231,144 colored children of school age in Georgia in 1880.)

What is the sum total of public money from all sources provided for the primary education of this army of children? We will take the figures for 1887—the returns for 1888 not being all in hand. The entire sum raised by the State and by cities and counties under local law for 1887 was \$795,987.26. Of this sum the cities and counties under local law and for local use raised \$302,477.74.

“COUNTRY CHILDREN.”

But most of Georgia's children are outside those cities and counties that, under local option, so nobly supplemented the meagre State fund. Of the whole number, 560,281, 490,270 do not live in such cities and counties. It is worse than this; for 465,738 of Georgia's children live outside of all incorporated cities, towns and villages. As we are accustomed to phrase it, they are country children. If an Atlanta audience would understand what the State school fund can do for half a million children—whose only dependence for help is the State fund—let us imagine the condition of things in this city if the money Atlanta raises for her splendid school system were all taken away and your children have only what the country children have.

“EIGHTY-SEVEN CENTS.”

Add to the sum directly disbursed by the Commissioner—minus the cost of county school superintendence, which in 1887 was \$25,051.19—the poll tax retained in the counties (it was in 1887 \$184,187.93) and we have a total of \$489,250.47. This is to be divided among the 560,281 children. If all were at school it would yield about 87 cents for each child, for the school year of three months.

ONE IN—TWO OUT.

Let us see how it works in the country. Take a particular county—a county better off than the average—my own county of DeKalb. In this county for 1888 there were 63 schools receiving aid from public school money. The total school fund for DeKalb county (estimating as the county Superintendent does the poll tax as \$100 more than last year) is \$4,834.34. The total number of children of school age in the county is 5,150. The amount actually paid for each scholar is \$2.60. That is, if each child at school received \$2.60 it is only because about two out of three children do not go to school at all.

ODDS AND ENDS.

Our backwardness in public education is illustrated by the method we employ to raise our 87 cents for each child, as well as by the meagre sum itself. It is a gathering of odds and ends. The only certain item of consequence is the yearly half rental of the Western and Atlantic Railroad—that our fathers built. (Surely we might let the whole rental go towards the education of their grand children.) There is a small item, tolerably certain, but less than \$2,000, dividends on a little Georgia Railroad stock owned by the State. Then we have the tax on “shows”—small and uncertain and not quite \$4,000. The liquor tax, a variable quantity, comes in to the extent of \$65,392.20. (It might be discussed by some debating society whether a contribution as small as this is an off-set to the “consequential damages” incident to the business itself?) The “hire of convicts,” another variable item, is nearly \$20,000. (This is cheap labor.) The inspection of fertilizers yields nearly \$100,000, but this is also a variable quantity. The poll tax, also variable, is about \$185,000. In raising our 87 cents we have made the schools dependent for the most part on the chances and changes of trade and crime.

If our law should remain as it is, the Commissioner's best hope for an increased fund must be in the increased use of imported fertilizers, more shows, more whisky drinking, and more convicts. Truly it is a distressing case; we sadly need more money for our schools, but many of the sources of supply are themselves evils so far reaching that we might almost choose to abide in ignorance.

GOOD AS THE PAY AND BAD AS THE WORST.

Now, let us look at the schools that our beggarly fund keeps going for about two and a half or three months in the year for less than half the children. What sort of schools are they? As good as the money will buy. Georgia puts less money in education than any State in the

Union, of equal ability, and has public schools so poor that if there be any worse, I know not where they are to be found. Exaggeration is hardly possible. Most of them are poor and miserable indeed. In seeking to be perfectly just in describing them, perhaps one should say—they are better than nothing. It would be risky to go further. But they are as good as the pay, and as good as Georgia can get for the pay.

A GOOD ANATOMY.

There is no trouble with our Georgia school system ; it is patterned after the best in America. Its anatomy is all right ; the bones are sound and in place. What it wants is muscle to cover its bones, and blood to round out its muscles.

It is the simplest thing in the world. A poor teacher makes a poor school ; poor pay secures a poor teacher, and will to the end of time. Some men would rather own a scrub cow than a Jersey of "Tenella's line;" but even these men, despising thoroughbreds in the name of "conservatism," know that they can't get a Jersey for the price of a scrub. Yet demand a good teacher for the pay of a hod-carrier, and if the teacher has the misfortune to be a woman, wants her labor for less. "Cheap doctors," "cheap teachers," "cheap judges," "cheap governors," to say nothing of "cheap preachers;" these phrases tell of poor economy.

Nothing known to me better illustrates Solomon's saying, "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty," and nothing is further from illustrating the other saying, "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth," than our use of the school fund of Georgia.

A RAILROAD WITHOUT A LOCOMOTIVE.

Nothing is so wasteful as the parsimony that does not spend enough to accomplish its purpose ; by so much as it falls short it is as water poured forth. We spend just enough

public money in primary education in common schools to do the least possible good and the greatest possible harm. Just enough to cripple little private schools, but not enough to make good public schools. This is a fair statement of the case in Georgia to-day, in the rural districts, where most of our people are. It is not much better in the small towns and villages.

As if a builder and equipper of railroads should grade a roadbed, lay his track, put some cars upon it, and yet not spend enough to get a locomotive. A tramway, a Middle Georgia dirt road—and there are no worse in civilization—with a yoke of oxen and a two-wheeled cart, is a better thing than a railroad without an engine. But railroaders are men of sense; when they build roads they put enough money in them to make them go. We put just enough money in public schools to give the people a low idea of education. Solomon's word fits us: "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it lendeth to poverty."

GEORGIA LEADS ILLITERACY.

What of the need of better education and more diffused education in Georgia? What are the facts? We must respect facts or cease to think. I rest my case at this point with one simple statement, backed by the tenth census: Georgia has more souls, "ten years old and upward," who cannot sign their own names than any other State in the American Union. In the long procession of illiterates we lead the van. The world looks on, it beholds our nakedness, and like Adam we are not ashamed; although with not so good reason as he. Listen to what we would gladly keep secret for very confusion of face: In 1880 22.9 per cent. of the white people—that is more than one in five—"ten years old and upward" could not write. I know of no reason for supposing that the percentage is less in 1888. In 1870, the white illiterate vote in Georgia was 21,899; in 1880, 28,571; the negro illiterate vote in 1870 was 100,551; in 1880, 116,516.

INVINCIBLES.

But there are those who are blind to facts and impenetrable by argument. Some of them I know and could name.

The man who looks wise and solemn, as if delivering a new found philosophy, and makes answer to any plea that can be made for better schools, "mere book-learning is not enough to make good citizens," and relapses into self-satisfied silence, that man is "invincible by any force the adversary may bring against him." He thinks his little commonplace truism is an argument against public schools. As if because "man cannot live by bread alone" he had better eat no bread at all.

There are two things about a man like this that I cannot make out: he is generally a man of more than average book-learning and he is generally inclined to be pious and is frequently a preacher. Does he really believe that knowledge is in itself favorable to vice? that "ignorance is the mother of devotion?" What risks he took in knowing so much! Do not argue with a man like this; he is "as one born out of due time;" he belongs of right to the thirteenth century. Yet you dare not disregard him; for like other dead things he is capable of much mischief.

Another invincible man is he who meets your plea for half a million children with the statement that "there are educated people in the penitentiary." Tell him, if you will waste words on him, that his logic should keep all ignorant people out of the penitentiary, he will stare at you in a pitying way and tell you that you don't understand the subject.

There is another the friends of popular education need not argue with—this man is not stupid, he is mean—the man, who believes that education will raise the price of wages and enable tenants and employes to keep accounts.

There may be many more equally invincible by arguments or facts, but I mention one more only—with him you can do nothing till he is "born again."

A SMALL WATCH-DOG.

It is a delicate matter for a public speaker to run the risk of being personal, but I am tolerably safe ; he is not here to-night ; it is against his principle to attend meetings in the interest of education. Besides, he is a busy man ; he is fully employed. Indeed, he has a " mission " and he devotes himself to it. By the votes of ignorance he is a member of the Legislature. His consuming desire is to save, or pretend to save, which suits his purpose far better, the people's money for them. He votes against all appropriations or for the lowest sum, not because it is enough to accomplish the needed work, but because it is the lowest sum. All rules, they say, have exceptions. His exception is to vote the highest sum when it concerns him or his.

With this slight exception he is consistent. He votes against the Department of Agriculture, although better farming is the basic condition of prosperity, although agriculture is the least understood business in the world, and we are further behind in this greatest of all human occupations than in anything else. If he gets a chance he will vote against the School of Technology, so splendidly begun, so greatly needed and so rich in blessings to Georgia, because he don't understand the subject and can't miss a chance to save the people's money for them. Georgia may be rich in undiscovered minerals, Alabama and Tennessee may be outstripping her, but what is all this to him, saving the people's money for them. He meets a proposition to appoint the best geologist, for a book-keepers salary, with ridicule. He sneers at the " fellow who goes around with a hammer tapping rocks," and looks to the gallery for applause. And men of sense submit to such as he.

Parasitic insects may rob the barnyards of poultry, slay the hogs in the field, blight the grapes in the vineyards, rot the potatoes and destroy fruit trees by the million ; costing the people untold thousands of dollars. Yet, when France is redeeming her vineyards by the researches of science, and

the civilized world follows her example, if some bold man were to move the appointment of a State entomologist to investigate causes and discover remedies, this saviour of the people's money runs to the dictionary to find the meaning of the word, grins the grin of ignorance and conceit, and ridicules science by talking of wasting the people's money on "bug hunters." And men of sense submit to such as he.

RIGHT ONCE.

Tell this man about the more than half million children of school age in Georgia, whose per capita claim—should they all attend the miserable little three-months schools and the wretched shanties and log pens called school houses, could hold them—is 87 cents per annum; tell him how poor and needy the people are; tell him what evils such masses of ignorance portend for the future of free institutions; the little saviour of the people's money frowns and grins by turns, tells you that his father never went to school a day in his life and that he himself picked up all he knows. I believe him, now; he is right for once, and unconsciously honest in what he says. And men of sense submit to such as he—than whom Georgia has no greater enemy.

To this man I make no appeal. But I do appeal to better men than he. I appeal to the honest constituents he has deceived with his pretentious zeal for economy that wastes what it spends.

How many and great evils grow out of our ignorance and starving schools God only knows. But an observing and reflecting man may know enough to make language impotent for full expression.

OUT OF BALANCE.

Some things, lying on the surface, I mention without discussion now. We are losing, for one thing, our best teachers. Meagre pay drives them into other business or other States. Texas has better public schools than Georgia; so

has Florida. And because they pay better salaries. Their training schools are not better than ours, or so good; but they draw teachers from us. And they draw our people away. We beg the world for immigrants and give other States emigrants.

There is another evil, deep and far reaching: Our best country people are moving to towns where it is possible. They have despaired of the half-taught three months schools in the country and they move to town with the hope of bettering the opportunities of their children for education. The results are evil. Town life increases expenses; absenteeism reduces the productive value of the farms; they get into debt; the farms are consumed; unless they all turn traders they drift into idleness, if not into drink and vice. If they go into trade, most of them fail. The equilibrium of population is destroyed; there are more people in town than town business can support, while the country is drained of its energy and intelligence. In all this movement there is a sort of natural selection that tends to leave in the country by and by only the most helpless and incapable. When towns grow rich and the country grows poor, the State dies of fatty degeneration of the heart.

SIX MONTHS SCHOOLS WILL REDEEM AGRICULTURE.

Ten years of thorough-going six months schools for the half million children of Georgia who live in the country will develop our farming interests more than improved implements, intensive farming—than all the Farmer's Alliance can do in a hundred years, if the Alliance, in its plans for bettering the condition of the farmers, leave out the education of the farmers' children.

Economists speak and write of the necessity of diversified industry, if we are to have general or permanent prosperity. They are right; but diversified industries are impracticable among uneducated people; diversified industries, as characteristic of the State, will never come to Georgia while half a million children—with few exceptions—depend for educa-

tion upon our wretched little three months schools—starved by stinginess born of ignorance.

SCHOOLS WILL GIVE FACTORIES.

Twenty years of thorough-going six months schools will build more factories in Georgia than all the syndicates. Presently, if Georgia does not educate her people, the syndicates must stop investments. For, ignorant and poor people don't want enough, and can't buy enough to justify large extension in manufacturing.

The little New England States, crowded with diversified and prosperous industries, show what thorough-going public schools have done in spite of a hard climate and an unfriendly soil.

WHO CAN BE SILENT?

How can one who loves his State and his fellow men be silent when he hears the bitter cry of these half million children—most of them country children—who least of all can afford to grow up in ignorance—this pitiful, wailing cry for learning—not any high and costly learning, but the rudiments—the learning that will set them free from the hopelessness of ignorance.

How can the pulpit, in the example and teaching of Jesus—bound to concern itself in whatever vitally concerns the welfare of the human race—how can the pulpit be silent when it hears this cry? But does it hear? Alas! there are some pulpits that, “having ears hear not, and having eyes see not.”

How can the press—the press that both reflects and molds public opinion—if it had no other motive than self-interest, seeking to extend circulation, how can the press be silent?

From our noble and well-loved Governor down to the humblest soldier who followed him with Lee's heroes in Virginia—down to the humblest negro who trusts him for justice and mercy, let every Georgian heed, with pitying

heart, the cry of our half million children for knowledge and command the State to give them bread instead of stones.

In this discussion and appeal I have said nothing of the two races that make up the population of Georgia, as to their special needs and perils. Nor will I. The plea I make is for the whole people—in the Constitution as in the Gospel ; in the statute law as in the righteousness of God, the claims and the rights of these two peoples are equal.

Georgia, exercising the common sense that respects facts, has separate schools for the two races. This, as I have taught a hundred times north and south, is best ; and it is necessary for both races. But Georgia must make adequate provision for all her children. Only so can Georgia do justice by them ; only so can Georgia prosper with them. The right education of the whole people, the real and permanent betterment of our schools, this is the question of questions before the General Assembly, the most vital of interests its wisdom can promote or its inattention destroy.







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